



U.S. Department of Justice

***United States Attorney
Eastern District of Arkansas***

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**LEADER OF METHAMPHETAMINE ORGANIZATION
SENTENCED TO LIFE IMPRISONMENT**

Little Rock – Jane W. Duke, United States Attorney for the Eastern District of Arkansas, and William J. Bryant, Assistant Special Agent in Charge of the Little Rock District Office for the Drug Enforcement Administration, announced that John Pascal Soward, age 37, of Trumann, Arkansas was sentenced to life imprisonment this morning for drug trafficking charges. The sentence was imposed by United States District Judge James M. Moody, who also imposed a concurrent term of 120 months imprisonment for certain firearms offenses.

Soward was one of the leaders of a drug trafficking organization responsible for transporting, manufacturing and distributing methamphetamine in northeastern Arkansas. The participants transported methamphetamine from California to Arkansas for distribution, and were also responsible for manufacturing methamphetamine. A total of 77 firearms utilized in connection with Soward's drug trafficking activities, including one submachine gun and two silencers; and property he acquired with drug proceeds, including a motorcycle and real estate located in Jonesboro, were ordered forfeited as part of the sentence.

Soward and seventeen co-defendants were charged last year with conspiracy to distribute methamphetamine. According to the indictment, this conspiracy operated from April 1997 until June 2006 and was responsible for the manufacture and distribution of more than 500 grams of methamphetamine. Soward was also charged with being a felon in possession of multiple firearms and being in possession of an unregistered submachine gun. All eighteen of the named defendants have since entered guilty pleas.

During today's sentencing, Senior Litigation Counsel Kevin Alexander noted that Soward is expected to appear in the Circuit Court of Craighead County, Arkansas in the near future to admit responsibility for, and enter a guilty plea to, participating with co-defendant Kelly Vest in

the 2003 murder of Ron Arnold near Trumann, Arkansas. Investigators learned of Arnold's murder and Soward and Vest's involvement in it during the course of the drug investigation. Last year, a firearm and spent shell casings reportedly used in the murder were recovered by DEA Special Agents and investigators in Craighead County.

"I am extremely proud of the work put forth by the investigators and prosecutors in this case. It truly has been a collaborative effort, with invaluable assistance being provided by our state and local partners. Thanks to the persistence of everyone involved, an extensive and violent drug distribution network has been completely dismantled," stated Duke.

This investigation was designated as an Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force (OCDETF) case. OCDETF is a Department of Justice program established in 1982 to conduct comprehensive, multi-level attacks on major drug trafficking and money laundering organizations. The principal mission of the OCDETF program is to identify, disrupt, and dismantle the most serious drug trafficking and money laundering organizations and those primarily responsible for the nation's drug supply.

The numerous convictions in this case are the result of the joint investigative effort of the Drug Enforcement Administration, the Arkansas State Police, the Arkansas Highway Police, the Arkansas National Guard, the Jonesboro Police Department, the Craighead County Sheriff's Office, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, the Internal Revenue Service-Criminal Investigation Division and Treasury Division, the Little Rock Police Department, the Clay County Sheriff's Office, the Trumann Police Department, the Second Judicial District Drug Task Force and the Second Judicial District Prosecuting Attorney's Office. This case has been prosecuted by Senior Litigation Counsel Kevin Alexander with the assistance of Asset Forfeiture Coordinator Karen Whatley.

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See Attachment for more information.

SUMMARY OF THE OTHER SENTENCES AND GUILTY PLEAS IN THIS CASE

WILLIAM EARL WATSON

Age: 51

Trumann, Arkansas

Conspiracy to distribute more than 500 grams of methamphetamine

75 months imprisonment

CHRISTOPHER ALEXANDER ISHMAEL

Age: 35

Jonesboro, Arkansas

Conspiracy to distribute more than 500 grams of methamphetamine

133 months imprisonment

DOUGLAS EUGENE JONES

Age: 55

Manila, Arkansas

Conspiracy to distribute more than 500 grams of methamphetamine

To be sentenced on March 7, 2008

KELLY EUGENE VEST

Age: 35

Harrisburg, Arkansas

Conspiracy to distribute more than 500 grams of methamphetamine

240 months imprisonment

DANNY RAY WISEMAN

Age: 37

Jonesboro, Arkansas

Conspiracy to distribute more than 500 grams of methamphetamine

64 months imprisonment

PARRISH C. MORRIS

Age: 40

Lafe, Arkansas

Conspiracy to distribute more than 500 grams of methamphetamine

87 months imprisonment

MITCHELL RAY QUALLS

Age: 45

Lake City, Arkansas

Conspiracy to distribute methamphetamine

To be sentenced on March 7, 2008

KEITH GUFFEY

Age: 46

Bono, Arkansas

Conspiracy to distribute more than 500 grams of methamphetamine
120 months imprisonment

JOSEPH BAUER JACKSON

Age: 26

Bono, Arkansas

Conspiracy to distribute more than 500 grams of methamphetamine
75 months imprisonment

JACK EDWARD JONES

Age: 39

Jonesboro, Arkansas

Conspiracy to distribute more than 50 grams of methamphetamine
To be sentenced on March 21, 2008

WILLARD LEO SPRAY

Age: 47

Trumann, Arkansas

Conspiracy to distribute more than 50 grams of methamphetamine
45 months imprisonment

JOE DON SCHULTE

Age: 33

Jonesboro, Arkansas

Conspiracy to distribute more than 50 grams of methamphetamine
4 years supervised release

DAVID FORRESTER

Age: 29

Searcy, Arkansas

Conspiracy to distribute more than 500 grams of methamphetamine
135 months imprisonment

CHRISTOPHER PITCHER

Age: 33

Paragould, AR

Conspiracy to distribute more than 500 grams of methamphetamine
To be sentenced March 21, 2008

DON BENJAMIN NELDON

Age:29

Jonesboro, AR

Conspiracy to distribute more than 500 grams of methamphetamine

To be sentenced March 21, 2008

ANTHONY TAYLOR WEST

Age: 37

Jonesboro, AR

Conspiracy to distribute more than 500 grams of methamphetamine

To be sentenced on March 21, 2008

DONALD LEE BALFOUR

Age: 36

Jonesboro, AR

Conspiracy to distribute more than 500 grams of methamphetamine

90 months imprisonment

SUMMARY OF CHARGES AND MAXIMUM PENALTIES:

Conspiracy to distribute more than 500 grams of methamphetamine, in violation of Title 21, United States Code, Section 846, is punishable by not less than 10 years imprisonment nor more than life imprisonment and/or a fine of up to \$4 million.

Conspiracy to distribute more than 50 grams of methamphetamine, in violation of Title 21, United States Code, Section 846, is punishable by not less than 5 years imprisonment nor more than 40 years imprisonment and/or a fine of up to \$2 million.

Conspiracy to distribute methamphetamine, in violation of Title 21, United States Code, Section 841(a)(1), is punishable by not more than 20 years imprisonment and/or a fine of up to \$1 million.

Unlawful possession of an unregistered submachine gun, in violation of Title 26, United States Code, Section 5841, 5845(a), 5861(d) and 5871, is punishable by not more than 10 years imprisonment and/or a fine up to \$ 250,000.

Felon in possession of firearms, in violation of Title 18, United States Code, 922(g)(1), is punishable by not more than 10 years imprisonment and/or a fine up to \$250,000.